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TAGS: PGOV PTER PINS PINR PREL CE LTTE

SUBJECT: LTTE Update: Tigers reportedly have success in recruiting; Divisions in the LTTE re peace process?

Refs: (A) Colombo 1815

- (B) Colombo 1299, and previous

(U) Classified by W. Lewis Amselem, Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

1. (C) This update of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) activities reviews the following:

-- Tigers reportedly having success recruiting

-- Divisions in the LTTE regarding the peace process??

-- LTTE spokesman Balasingham said to be "obsessed" with the U.S.

-- In a first, Tigers publish a newspaper in Sinhala, the language of the majority community

Reported Success in Recruiting

2. (C) The LTTE seems to be having some success in recruiting. According to various contacts, the LTTE may have added several hundred new cadre since the peace process started in December 2001. (Note: The LTTE is variously estimated to have approximately 8,000-12,000 personnel.) Jehan Perera, the head of a local think-tank, told us that he had heard that the LTTE was urging Tamils to join by asserting that "we have won the war, and now need supporters to help administer the north and east." Perera said this type of pitch was reportedly effective, especially in Jaffna District, where government security forces have eased their long-standing clampdown, allowing the LTTE to emerge from the shadows.

3. (C) In addition to its calibrated pitch, the LTTE's recruiting drive seems quite sophisticated and extensive. Tamil politicians report that trained LTTE recruitment teams have spread out across the north and the east. The teams show videos of past LTTE military/terrorist exploits, hand out pamphlets, and then try to sign up volunteers on the spot. To stay on cue, the teams are given prepared answers to possible questions from event attendees. (Note: While the recruitment drive events are intensive, G. Ponnambalam, a senior Tamil National Alliance MP, told us that they are much more low-key than the pro-LTTE "Pongu Tamil" festivals held earlier this year. These events involved mammoth crowds surrounded by large posters of LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran and included ritualistic pledges in support of LTTE goals.)

4. (C) Comment: With the peace process moving at full tilt, the LTTE is apparently searching for a different type of recruit. In the past, the vast majority of the recruits were earmarked to join the LTTE's military wing. Contacts report, however, that the LTTE's new focus is on recruiting for political and administrative positions in the expectation that the LTTE will soon be in the de facto position of governing the north and east. This is not to say that military recruitment is not going on: LTTE Trincomalee military chief Paduman recently officiated at a widely publicized "graduation ceremony" for about a hundred armed "cadets." End Comment.

Divisions re Peace Process?

5. (S/NF) Tentative reports are emerging of divisions

in the LTTE regarding the direction of the peace process. Milinda Moragoda, a key Sri Lankan government official involved in peace process issues (Amcit--pls protect), told us that the GSL had intercepted LTTE communications indicating that there was some dissonance toward LTTE spokesman Anton Balasingham's management of the peace process. While it was not clear, Moragoda continued, the feeling among some in the LTTE (NFI) was that Balasingham was taking too soft a line toward the GSL.

16. (S/NF) Meanwhile, other contacts report that regional tensions in the LTTE remain a factor, with leaders in the east (Karuna, Karikalan) more hard-line than most of the leadership in the north. That said, there are reports of hard-liners in the north, too: Ponnambalam told polchief that Colonel Banu, a high-level military official based at LTTE headquarters in Kilinochchi, was known to be quite apprehensive about the peace process and what he saw as its negative effect on the LTTE's military preparedness.

17. (S/NF) Comment: Little is known about the nature of the LTTE decision-making process, except that Prabhakaran seems firmly in charge. Thus, the real issue is who has influence on Prabhakaran. What we are hearing is a bit fuzzy, but it potentially may indicate that a hard-line, irreconcilable element may be trying to marginalize Balasingham in order to slow down the peace process. End Comment.

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Balasingham said to be "Obsessed" with the U.S.
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18. (C) Despite the lack of direct contact, the LTTE seems to maintain a deep interest in the U.S. Based on his recent meetings with Balasingham at the September peace talks in Thailand, Milinda Moragoda reported that the Tiger spokesman peppered him with questions on where the U.S. stands with regard to the conflict. Moragoda's impression was that Balasingham was "obsessed" on the subject. In one conversation, for example, when Moragoda noted that he was going to the U.S. after the conclusion of the talks, Balasingham sniffed, "What for? To buy arms?" Moragoda said he had jokingly replied that he had done that during his last visit.

19. (C) Comment: In comments tending to back up Moragoda's report, we have heard from other contacts that the LTTE is very worried about the stance of the U.S. toward the group. This concern seems to have spiked in the aftermath of September 11 and continued on from that date. At the heart of the LTTE's interest seems to be a nagging fear that the U.S. may one day directly confront the LTTE. Many Sri Lankans, including Moragoda, believe that this concern about the U.S. and its reaction is one of the factors driving the LTTE's continued involvement in the peace process. End Comment.

LTTE Publishes in Sinhala

110. (SBU) For the first time in its history, the LTTE has published a paper in Sinhala, the language of Sri Lanka's majority Sinhalese community. The first edition of "Dedunna" ("Rainbow") was published in September. The paper is a weekly and is published in Kilinochchi. It is not clear how many copies of the paper the LTTE is distributing. It seems to be free and is of relatively high quality with colored photos.

111. (C) Comment: In publishing the paper, the LTTE seems to be making an effort to reach out and explain its positions to the Sinhalese south. For many years, the LTTE has been active in publishing with front organizations putting out Tamil- and English-language periodicals. Of late, websites have also been established. The LTTE has never published in Sinhala, however. If the first edition is anything to go by, it is doubtful that the weekly will go over that well in the south: its huge photo of Prabhakaran will probably not be a big draw, nor will photos of children in uniforms dancing under the sinister, North Korea-like slogan "peace through freedom." End Comment.

112. (U) Minimize considered.

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